DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 557 JC 870 428

AUTHOR Colby, Anita; Opp, Ron
TITLE Controversies Surrounding Developmental Education in the Community College. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, Los Angeles, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Feb 87
CONTRACT 400-86-0051
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Developmental Studies Programs; Outcomes of Education; *Program Effectiveness; *Remedial Instruction; *Remedial Programs; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Criticisms have been raised about large scale community college involvement in developmental education. A number of these criticisms seem valid, while others clearly are not. Some of the most commonly voiced concerns include the following: (1) "The community college is the wrong place to provide developmental education"; (2) "Developmental education costs too much"; (3) "Developmental education should be the responsibility of a separate instructional division, not the responsibility of instructors in the collegiate curricula"; (4) "Community college faculty members do not know how to teach literacy"; (5) "There is insufficient articulation between community colleges and secondary schools"; and (6) "Placement and diagnostic tests are not valid." Close examination of these criticisms reveals a lack of understanding of the nature and goals of developmental programs. Remediation is not only the most practical response to declines in student literacy, but it is also at the very heart of an open-door college. Steps to be taken to maximize assistance to students and maintain the integrity of the institution include implementing developmental education throughout the curriculum; mandating counseling, tutoring, and other support services; integrating tutorial and learning laboratory activities with classroom instruction; requiring reading and writing assignments; and using entry and exit examinations. (EJV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED286557

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Controversies Surrounding Developmental Education in the Community College

by

Anita Colby and Ron Opp

ERIC Digest
February, 1987

ERIC Clearinghouse for Jr. Colleges
UCLA

JC 870428

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES

ERIC DIGEST

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER

February 1987

CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by Anita Colby and Ron Opp

The literacy rates of high school graduates began to deteriorate in the mid-1960's, resulting in the matriculation of a large proportion of community college students with inadequate basic skills. This decline in student literacy has continued, dictating that developmental studies will be central to the community college curriculum and involve all college personnel.

From the onset, criticisms have been raised about large-scale community college involvement in developmental education. Some of these criticisms seem valid, while others clearly are not. A discussion of some of the most commonly voiced concerns follows.

"The Community College Is the Wrong Place to Provide Developmental Education."

Some people believe that two-year colleges, as institutions of higher learning, should not offer any developmental education courses. They maintain that such education properly belongs in adult schools, the private sector, or on-the-job training programs. This argument is often advanced by college faculty who feel that their work environment would be improved if students were better prepared to handle course requirements (Brawer and Friedlander, 1979, p. 32).

However, the recommendation that community colleges should abdicate responsibility for teaching underprepared students denies the reality of today's educational landscape. State higher education policy makers intentionally concentrate the remedial function within two-year colleges in order to free the state colleges and universities of this function. Moreover, developmental education programs are the logical outgrowth of

JC 870 428

****
The Clearinghouse operates under OERI Contract No. 400-86-0051. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI and no official endorsement by OERI should be inferred.
****

the focus on access which has traditionally characterized the two-year college. For the open door community college, it is just as untenable and immoral to deny access to students because of inadequate reading, writing, and computation skills, as it is to bar students because of sex, race, or lack of resources. Community colleges are a place where students who are ineligible to enter four-year institutions of higher education can remediate basic skills deficiencies and obtain the college education that would be otherwise out of their reach. (Roueche and Baker, 1987, p. 72)

"Developmental Education Costs Too Much."

Taxpayers and their legislative representatives frequently object to paying time and again for the remediation of the academic deficiencies of a student at each level of the educational pipeline. These objections are commonly raised in response to the relatively high per-student cost of remedial education. Some community college leaders counter this contention with the somewhat self-defeating argument that remedial education can be provided more cheaply by community colleges than by four-year colleges and universities. The image of the community college as a collegiate institution would be better served if administrators focused instead on ways to effect cost savings in developmental programs.

One way of cutting costs is to utilize paraprofessional aides to provide the one-to-one instruction and monitoring needed by remedial students. Senior citizens, community members, and advanced students often find tutoring so personally rewarding that they are willing to work for relatively low wages. Furthermore, the use of such aides in the classroom or learning laboratory allows the professional instructor to better utilize his or her time.

"Developmental Education Should Be the Responsibility of a Separate Instructional Division, Not the Responsibility of Instructors in the Collegiate Curricula."

Many community college practitioners argue that underprepared students are not well served by an instructional system that expects them to remediate their skill deficiencies while pursuing college-level studies. They contend that such a system merely provides students with the "right to fail," while burdening instructors with students who lack the skills to learn what is being taught. They argue that remedial instruction is best provided within a separate department of developmental studies by a cadre of experts in remedial instruction.

Others support the practice of integrating remediation and literacy development throughout the curriculum. They maintain that an isolated one-shot approach to literacy development is not of lasting value, if the literacy skills are not reinforced through the curriculum. Richardson and others (1983) provide ample evidence that literacy among community college students is on the decline precisely because reading and writing assignments are kept to a minimum. Faced with increasingly

large proportions of ill-prepared students, faculty members often respond by minimizing reading and writing assignments, thus perpetuating students' literacy problems. If community colleges are to graduate literate students, then every program and every department should have its own developmental education component.

"Community College Faculty Members Do Not Know How to Teach Literacy"

Most community college faculty members have no formal training in reading and writing instruction, and many are reluctant to shoulder the responsibility for basic skills development. To encourage and inform faculty involvement in remedial education, developmental educators need to take on the role of staff development specialists. Remedial instructors can be instrumental in making content-area faculty aware of (1) their own contributions to the literacy problem, (2) the availability of learning support services for students, and (3) feasible ways of implementing reading and writing instruction across the curriculum.

"There Is Insufficient Articulation between Community Colleges and Secondary Schools."

Clearly, this is a justified criticism. As community college leaders have increasingly identified themselves and their institutions with higher education, their professional connections with high schools have been weakened considerably. The community colleges seem to be sending the message to the secondary schools that they will take students as they come, and that there is no need to worry about course articulation. Evidence of the lack of faculty involvement in articulation was found in the teacher surveys conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges in the 1970's (Cohen and Brawer, 1977). Instructors were asked if they had ever gone into a secondary school to discuss their courses with their counterparts or to recruit students for their programs. Only one in ten responded that he/she had.

"Placement and Diagnostic Tests Are Not Valid."

The growing use of standardized tests to assess the skill levels of entering students and assign those with deficiencies to appropriate remedial services has fostered concerns about the validity and fairness of these tests. Many see them as culturally biased instruments that are only relevant to English and mathematics. Others question the practice of mandating remedial courses for that small group of students who can overcome skill deficiencies on their own and succeed in college-level courses.

Despite the criticism of testing, it has proved an important tool in student literacy development. Miami-Dade Community College, for example, requires that any student who enrolls in more than three classes or in any English or mathematics course take placement examinations in English and mathematics (McCabe, 1984). On the basis of

test results, the student is then counseled into the most appropriate course section. Although there is no unequivocal emperical evidence of the effectiveness of this procedure, survey results indicate that developmental students and teachers, college staff and administrators, and community groups feel that the testing/placement program is helpful to developmental students and should be continued. (Miami-Dade, 1985). Furthermore, a 1984 study showed that about 30% of the students who were successful on the College-Level Academic Skills Test (a state-mandated examination determining whether a student can transfer into the junior year at the State University) had skill deficiencies when they entered Miami-Dade. Since the State University System does not admit freshmen with skills deficiencies in even one area, these students have accomplished what they could not have achieved otherwise -- access to a four-year degree.

Conclusion

Developmental education in the community college has been criticized on a number of levels. Close examination of these criticisms reveals a lack of understanding of the nature and goals of developmental programs. Remediation is not only the most practical response to declines in student literacy, but it is also "at the very heart of an open-door college" (Roueche and Baker, p.72). Steps to be taken to maximize assistance to student and maintain the integrity of the institution include (1) implementing developmental education throughout the curriculum; (2) mandating counseling, tutoring and other support services; (3) integrating tutorial and learning laboratory activities with classroom instruction; (4) requiring every instructor to give reading and writing assignments to students; and (5) using entry and exit tests to document basic skills gains as students progress through the curriculum.

For Further Information

Cohen, A.M. and Brawer, F.B. The American Community College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.

Cohen, A.M. and Brawer, F.B. The Two-Year College Instructor Today. New York: Praeger, 1977.

McCabe, R.H. A Status Report on the Comprehensive Educational Reform at Miami-Dade Community College. Miami: Miami-Dade Community College, 1984. (ED 238 481)

Miami-Dade Community College 1984 Institutional Self-Study. Volume II: Prescriptive Education. Miami: Miami-Dade Community College, 1985. (ED 259 770)

Richardson, R. C., Jr., and others. Literacy in the Open-Access College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983.

Roueche, J.E.; Baker, G.A. Access & Excellence: The Open-Door College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges NOV 13 1987